

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 141

By Akbari

A RESOLUTION to recognize Memphis legend Deanie Parker in honor of Black History Month.

WHEREAS, though our great Nation was founded upon the noble precepts of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the declaration of these notions as our country's bedrock tenets preceded their ultimate egalitarian application, leaving generations of Americans bereft of the basic unalienable rights promised to them by our forebears; and

WHEREAS, early iterations of American society were harrowing arenas for African Americans; yet, even once the heinous institution of slavery was renounced, the road to equality was fraught with untold obstacles for these citizens. In spite of this, African Americans persevered, contributing to American identity, culture, and progress in countless, immeasurable ways and playing a central role in every phase of our country's more than two-hundred-forty-year history; and

WHEREAS, in hopes of raising awareness of African Americans' contributions to civilization, renowned Harvard-trained historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, an organization Mr. Woodson founded, sponsored Negro History Week in 1926; the second week in February was chosen in order to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass; and

WHEREAS, by the late 1960s, thanks in part to the Civil Rights Movement, Negro History Week had evolved into Black History Month on many college campuses; in 1976, President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized February as Black History Month, an act replicated by every president every year since; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month is, as President Ford stated, an opportunity to "honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor

throughout our history"; it is the privilege of this General Assembly to recognize the vast accomplishments of African Americans; and

WHEREAS, it is also the privilege of this General Assembly to honor those individuals who have contributed significantly to this State's musical heritage, thereby enriching the lives of citizens throughout this State, the Nation, and the world; and

WHEREAS, one such individual is Deanie Parker, and during Black History Month, it is especially fitting that we highlight her integral role in both the seminal years of the Southern soul music that calls Memphis home and the perpetuation of this music's legacy; and

WHEREAS, born in Duncan, Mississippi, Ms. Parker attended Hamilton High School in Memphis, where she was the first female lead singer of the glee club; at the behest of her school's music instructor, she entered a talent contest held on Beale Street in 1963, ultimately winning first place and earning the opportunity to audition at Stax Records; and

WHEREAS, Deanie Parker went on to record several songs at Stax, including "My Imaginary Guy" and "Each Step I Take," both of which enjoyed regional success; however, she soon realized that she could more effectively contribute to the growing music operation in various additional capacities, from songwriter and secretary to photographer and editor; and

WHEREAS, in awe of the talent at Stax, Ms. Parker was in the midst of such greats as Carla Thomas, Rufus Thomas, Booker T. and the MGs, Otis Redding, the Staple Singers, the Memphis Horns, and many others; she served as publicist for Stax and toured with many of the artists throughout the South; and

WHEREAS, eventually, her musical and professional acumen led to her becoming director of publicity, artists, and community relations for Stax Records; and

WHEREAS, after her career at Stax came to an end, she set about ensuring that the legacy of the organization and the Memphis Sound would endure; she helped found and was the first president and chief executive officer of the Soulsville Foundation, a nonprofit organization that built and continues to manage the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, Stax Music Academy, and The Soulsville Charter School; and

WHEREAS, each of the three entities under the Soulsville Foundation's umbrella preserves Memphis music history while imbuing younger generations with an appreciation for Southern soul music: the museum houses a vast collection of exhibits and artifacts, hosts live music events, and operates outreach programs; the academy inspires young people and enhances their academic, cognitive, performance, and leadership skills through music; and the charter school prepares students for success in college and beyond in an academically rigorous, music-rich environment; and

WHEREAS, ever dedicated to serving the public through organizations that seek to promote the humanities, Ms. Parker has served as a commissioner of the Tennessee Arts Commission and as a board member of WKNO Broadcasting, the Memphis Tourism Foundation, and the Soulsville Foundation; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Parker currently serves on the Tennessee State Museum Commission and on the board of The Soulsville Charter School, and she is an advisor for the University of Memphis Alumni Association's National Executive Board of Directors; she is a life member of both Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and the NAACP; and

WHEREAS, often duly recognized for her good work, Ms. Parker has been honored with the Alumni Achievement award and the Distinguished Alumni award from University of Memphis, the Diversity Memphis Humanitarian of the Year award, and two Emmys for the documentary "I Am A Man," for which she was the executive director and composed the title song; she received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from LeMoyne-Owen College in 2001; and

WHEREAS, a woman of devout faith, Deanie Parker was born and reared in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and currently holds membership with the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Parker is a pioneer in the music recording industry, an active volunteer in the field of music education and academic preparation, and a living legend to those who remember and still enjoy the Memphis Sound of the Stax era, and it is fitting that she be recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we recognize and honor Deanie Parker during this observation of Black History Month, thanking her for her countless contributions to the musical heritage and legacy of this State and wishing her much success and happiness in all her future endeavors

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.